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TAGS: [IR](#) [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [SNAR](#)
SUBJECT: UNODC OFFICIAL VIEWS IRAN DRUG CHIEF REPLACEMENT A SIGN OF
HARDLINER RESURGENCE

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(S/NF) Summary: The head of Tehran's UNODC office sees the recent dismissal of Fada Hossein Maleki as head of the Drug Control Headquarter as a sign that President Ahmadi-Nejad got the upper hand over Expediency Council head Rafsanjani. Although appointed by Ahmadi-Nejad, Maleki reportedly moved into Rafsanjani's camp as he came to see value in international engagement on the drug issue. When he reportedly confronted Ahmadi-Nejad over the president's decision not to let him attend a ministerial level meeting in Vienna, Ahmadi-Nejad fired him but was unable to actually get rid of him until the crisis over the British sailors strengthened his position over pragmatists, in Arbitrio's view. The UN official noted that while he believed hardliners currently had the upper hand in Iran, the internal political dynamics could shift again. He also said Iranians increasingly recognize that their own government is the source of Iran's tense international relations. End summary.

2.(S/NF) UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Tehran-based Field rep Roberto Arbitrio (Italian citizen, please protect) opined in an April 21 meeting with IRPOffs that the recent dismissal of Fada Hossein Maleki as secretary-general of the Drug Control Headquarters demonstrates that currently hardliners have the upper hand in Iran. Arbitrio's account fills in holes from recent conflicting reports in the Iranian press whether or not Maleki was on his way out, prior to the definitive news of Brigadier General Esmaeel Ahmadi-Mogaddam's swearing-in April 11. Arbitrio's assessment is based on a conversation between his staff and Maleki and therefore only tells Maleki's side of the story. Arbitrio's updates on the drug situation in Iran and Iran's regional cooperation to be provided septel.

Maleki unemployed or not?

3.(S/NF) As background, Arbitrio said that when UNODC Director General Costa visited Iran in November 2006, Maleki appealed to him for assistance in helping Iran approach the international community on the drug issue via Afghanistan and specifically NATO. Maleki's interest in international engagement, Arbitrio said, was the result of UNODC's efforts over a year and a half to convince him of the benefits of such activities. He noted that in Costa's subsequent meeting with Ahmadi-Nejad, the

president did not specifically reiterate the point about reaching out to NATO, calling only for regional engagement. Nonetheless, UNODC assumed his endorsement, given that Maleki was seen as close to Ahmadi-Nejad, who had appointed him.

4.(S/NF) According to Arbitrio, Costa took this request on board and worked on organizing a ministerial level delegation from Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan to address major donors in Vienna. When he heard the meeting was moving ahead, Maleki was reportedly very happy and grateful, and said he would attend. However, when the Iranian authorities sent passports to the Tehran UNODC office for the trip, Maleki's was missing. Late February, UNODC in Tehran heard that perhaps Maleki would not go and perhaps no one else would go either. However, in Vienna, the Iranian mission told UNODC that all was on track. By February 27, Arbitrio, already in Vienna, heard no one was traveling from Iran. Reportedly, the Pakistanis were very upset when they heard the Iranians were pulling out, and Afghanistan and Pakistan eventually sent a lower level delegation.

5.(S/NF) On March 2, Iranian Ambassador Soltaniyeh requested a meeting with Costa, attended by Arbitrio. Soltaniyeh reportedly made no apologies for Iran's no-show, simply saying that Maleki had a "personal commitment," and reiterated Iran's interest in increasing international cooperation. Costa was reportedly very upset by Iran's handling of the matter but said he would continue to try to facilitate international contacts.

6.(S/NF) Arbitrio said his staff later (no date given) talked directly to Maleki about what had happened. Maleki reportedly said that when he learned about the ministerial meeting, he requested a meeting with Ahmadi-Nejad. After the president "reluctantly" gave him an appointment, he told Maleki he would not approve the meeting. When Maleki pressed for a reason, saying that Costa had organized the meeting as a response to the president's request, Ahmadi-Nejad gave no explanation.

7.(S/NF) According to Arbitrio's readout of the conversation

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with Maleki, others lobbied the president to change his mind about Iranian attendance at the Vienna meeting, including Judiciary chief Shahroudi and Foreign Minister Mottaki, without success. Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi could not even get a meeting with the president, according to Maleki. Maleki claimed he managed to get a second meeting with Ahmadi-Nejad in which he pleaded to be allowed to go. When Ahmadi-Nejad did not change his mind, Maleki claimed he told the president he was making a mistake, and Ahmadi-Nejad reportedly responded by firing him.

8.(S/NF) Maleki reportedly then contacted Expediency Council Chair Rafsanjani, who got angry that he had not been consulted. According to Iran's drug policy, the president is the chair of the Drug Control Headquarters, but the Expediency Council plays a supervisory role. After some kind of intervention by Rafsanjani, Maleki's dismissal was reportedly rescinded, and Maleki traveled mid-March to Vienna for a different anti-narcotics meeting. In Vienna, Maleki reportedly reassured Costa that he was still in charge. Arbitrio said it was a strange delegation that traveled with Maleki, less than half of whom seemed pro-Maleki, most pro-IRGC. When Maleki met with Costa, the delegation insisted on providing its own interpreter, which Arbitrio said was not standard.

9.(S/NF) Per Arbitrio's Foreign Ministry sources, the source of the tension between Maleki and Ahmadi-Nejad was Maleki's growing closeness with Rafsanjani. As Maleki reportedly came to see the value of engagement on the drug issue to Iran's overall foreign policy, he gradually moved towards Rafsanjani, who was more sympathetic to this view than Ahmadi-Nejad. Ahmadi-Nejad was reportedly unhappy about the situation but only saw his chance to act upon it in the aftermath of the British sailors crisis. According to Arbitrio, Ahmadi-Nejad had orchestrated the incident to get the upper hand over the pragmatists. Arbitrio believes that one consequence of the situation was that

Ahmadi-Nejad succeeded in dismissing Maleki. Two days after the sailors' release, Maleki received his dismissal letter. What was particularly unusual, the letter did not include an onward assignment.

10.(S/NF) Arbitrio also commented he was surprised how out-of-the-loop the Foreign Ministry had been on the issue, saying that UNODC heard before the ministry did that Maleki was not being allowed to attend the ministerial meetings in Vienna.

Starting over with a new head

11.(S/NF) Maleki's replacement, Ahmadi-Moqaddam, also retains his role as Chief of Police and supposedly has the protection of the president. He is reportedly married to the president's sister. He comes out of the IRGC and reportedly met Ahmadi-Nejad working on security issues in Kurdistan. He was also deputy commander of the Basij. Rafsanjani reportedly criticized Moqaddam for helping Ahmadi-Nejad in the presidential elections. Arbitrio said that Maleki had earlier told him before that Ahmadi-Nejad wanted to replace him with Moqaddam, in order to get the police inside the Drug Control Headquarters.

12.(S/NF) Arbitrio, who was in Dubai en route to Pakistan, said he would meet Moqaddam for the first time after his return to Iran. He expressed frustration at having to rebuild a relationship with the new head and - he hoped - convince him of the benefits of international engagement on the drug issue. Arbitrio could not say he understood what Ahmadi-Nejad's policy on the issue was. Maleki's dismissal could have been the result of policy differences on this issue of international engagement, or it could have been simply intended to punish Maleki for switching alliances. He also noted that other issues could have been at play. Maleki had come from mid-level ranks of the Ministry of Interior and as such was not widely accepted by the police. This supposedly caused problems in implementing Drug Control Headquarters policy. Now, the drug office and the anti-narcotics police are unified, but Arbitrio said it was too soon to judge whether this would have positive or negative effects on drug policy. He also repeated a rumor that Moqaddam may have been appointed to the new position in essence to sideline him because of unhappiness with his performance regarding the deteriorating security situation in Sistan-va Baluchistan.

Hardliners on the upsurge

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13.(S/NF) Arbitrio, who very clearly caveats between what he knows and what he surmises, said he believes that as a result of the seizure of the British sailors, the hardliners generally have the upper hand in Iran. He noted, however, that this could change at any time, making Iranian decision-making hard to predict. He believes that Ahmadi-Nejad knows he faces a legitimacy gap, demonstrated in every democratic exercise in Iran, including the December 2006 elections and the push-back he has gotten from the Majles. Arbitrio said the Iranians he knows believe the hardliners know they will lose in any future election absent any change, so the hardliners are either plotting to forego elections or to make sure elections are held in a crisis situation. Therefore, in Arbitrio's view, Ahmadi-Nejad uses crises like the nuclear issue and the British sailors to artificially create consensus and to confront pragmatists. Arbitrio also believes that Ahmadi-Nejad, who he has met in two short meetings as well as the long meeting with Costa, suffers from a Napoleonic complex (Arbitrio estimated his height at 168 cm). He had heard that the president has fired people for being taller than him.

14.(S/NF) The religious-military alliance sees itself above democracy, and isolation and tension simply empowers them. Arbitrio also claimed that Iran is increasingly militarized, citing visible anti-aircraft weapons both around Tehran and en

route to Esfahan. He is also increasingly doubtful of the Supreme Leader's control over the situation. He thinks the Supreme Leader feels more threatened by Rafsanjani than by Ahmadi-Nejad, particularly given Rafsanjani's calls to reassess the role of the Supreme Leader. Arbitrio also said that he is hearing for the first time in a long time that there are limits to Rafsanjani's scope of action, and he doubted reformers could have much impact on the political scene.

15.(S/NF) Arbitrio said there is a real fear in Iran that war is on the horizon. UNODC and embassies are doing contingency planning, he has stocked up on food and water at home, and embassies are counting their nationals. One ambassador told him that until three months ago, he thought conflict was unlikely but that he was now discouraged and saw no sign that Iran would pursue a sensible solution. One change Arbitrio noted among Iranian people with whom he has contact, however, was that in the past they blamed US policy for the tense bilateral relations, but now they've realized that their president is to blame. They are more worried what the "Iranian Hizballah" will do and say next than what the US will do. They also see that it is no longer a US-Iran issue, but that the international community is unified in their objections to Iranian behavior.
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